



Castle
Of
Frankenstein

SATANISM & VAMPIRES

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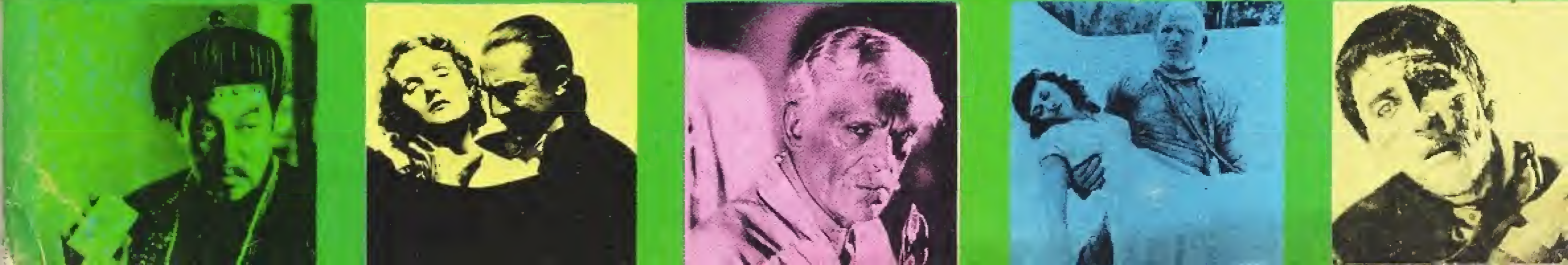
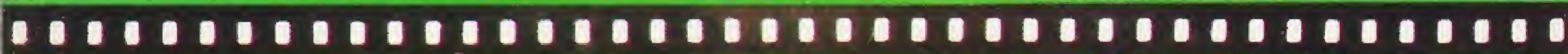
CASTLE of FRANKENSTEIN

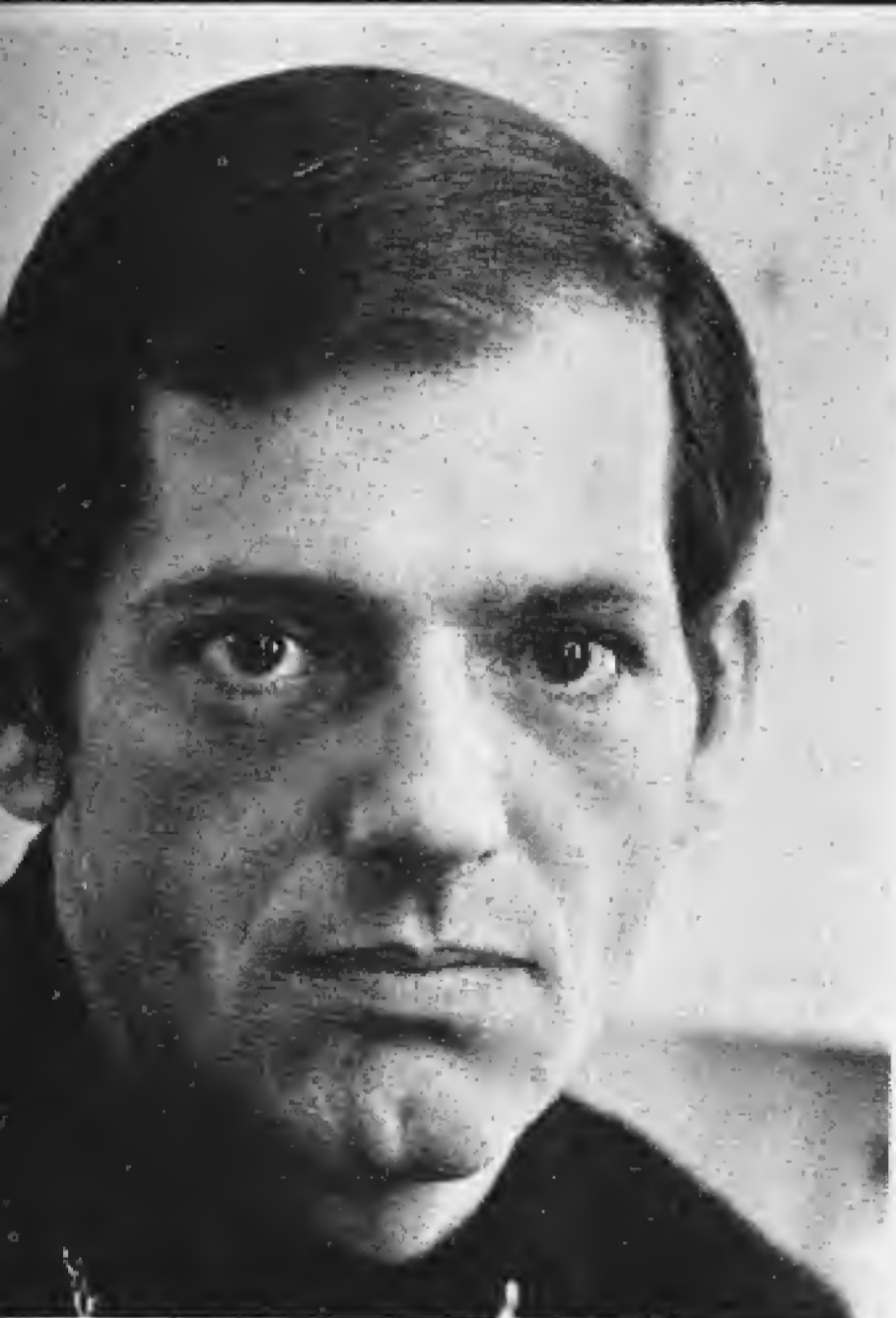
Preview:
DINOSAURS
RULE THE
EARTH !!!

HISTORY OF
HORROR
FILMS

HEADitorial

ROBERT "Psycho"
BLOCH





Alex Stevens was the stuntman for actor Don Briscoe, who has played the role of Chris Jennings, a werewolf in the TV version of DARK SHADOWS. In order to produce for the viewers Jennings' instantaneous transformation into a wolf man, Stevens' arduous hours of makeup preparation are evident in the shots (above and below) as he became ready by video-taping time.



TV GUIDE critic Cleveland Amory (both of him) opined that DARK SHADOWS is the all-time worst presentation "in the history of entertainment." This reveals Mr. Amory's lack of familiarity with his subject, since everybody's aware that Bert I. Gordon's VILLAGE OF THE GIANTS is the worst thing in the history of entertainment!

The fact is that DARK SHADOWS, a videotaped daily ABC-TV serial, is an oasis in the wasteland of TV's daytime programmed mental retardation. Produced and created by Dan Curtis, who was responsible for the fine DR. JEKYLL & MR. HYDE tv special with Jack Palance, DS is soap-opera styled but with the accent on suspense and terror rather than the usual socio-sexual hangups.

Beginning in 1966 as a Gothic-type mystery serial aimed at teenage girls, it followed the misfortunes of pretty Victoria Winters (Alexandra Moltke) after taking a job as governess at the forbidding Collinswood estate in isolated Collinsport, New England, overseen by high-strung Elizabeth Stoddard (Joan Bennett), and being frightened by the expected transparently "unexplainable" events. This formula proved unrewarding, and the show was going nowhere when a 175-year-old vampire named Barnabas Collins, played by Jonathan Frid, was introduced experimentally. The character caught on and Curtis was quick to shift the emphasis from mystery to the supernatural, as Karloff's NBC THRILLER series had done a few years before much to its success.

Since then the program has been merchandising itself into a major industry, including an endless string of paperback novels, one-shot publications, coloring books, record albums, and now, the boxoffice movie success, HOUSE OF DARK SHADOWS.

The show itself has become a compendium of horror movie clichés, brought to a boil by concentrating all the action, mostly culled from old Universal pictures, upon one family. DS's characters have suffered more shocks and horrors than three generations of Universal contract players; yet whenever the supernatural rears its shaggy head, they react as if it were intruding on an uneventful existence in Scarsdale. Thus we have Barnabas, himself a reformed vampire who has been killed and revived at least a number of times, participating in various magical and monster-making experiments, shifting back and forth in time innumerable occasions, watched a friend turn into a werewolf, and seen Mrs. Stoddard return alive and unharmed from entombment alive after six weeks, greeting every occult plot twist with puzzlement and the inevitable "...it can't be possible!"

Such things contribute to the pleasantly redundant quality of the soap opera form, stretching each development into weeks or even months, enabling viewers to pick up on the story even after missing huge chunks. It took Barnabas six weeks to figure out that little David Collins (David Henesy) was under control of an evil spirit from the grave, forcing him to do his bidding—like the time it made the boy string a wire across the staircase, tripping and half-killing his father—a neat trick for the kiddies at home to try. Of course, wise professor Stokes (Thayer David) knew what was going on at the outset, but, as usual, nobody paid much attention.

Along the way, Barnabas has been transformed into the show's hero, and frankly Frid makes a better, more persuasive hero than a vampire, battling in true Van Helsing style against the various powers of Evil, his vampiric past endowing him with a somewhat anti-hero cast. Frid manages to imbue the character with some dignity and even depth in the face of what is obviously limited rehearsal time.

Miss Moltke, who made no secret of her distress at her clichéd role (Honestly, Victoria is so dumb!), was written out some time ago by

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having her character disappear into the past, the heroine role being assumed by both Nancy Barrett and Kathryn Leigh-Scott. The nature of the program allows actors to be "killed" and return from time to time as ghosts, which at least provides a sort of job security.

Visually DARK SHADOWS is the best TV serial yet aired. The lighting and use of color are excellent, and the sheer number and variety of sets must set a soap opera record. The budget apparently doesn't allow for re-taping, so every fluff, camera misdirection, visible crew-member and production error is left in, endowing the show with some of the excitement and human interest which made live TV so much fun back in the dear, dead Fifties. Nothing arouses audience empathy more than the sight of a harried actor groping for forgotten lines while trying to steal a discreet glimpse of the cue card.

Despite the occasional mistakes, or maybe because of them, DS is highly enjoyable. The entire cast has been able and often better than the material, and the directors frequently work out some stylish effects and unexpectedly nice touches.

The writers have borrowed liberally from DRACULA, FRANKENSTEIN, BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN, THE WOLF MAN, THE PREMATURE BURIAL, THE UNDEAD, and THE INNOCENTS, among others, giving the goings-on an affecting sub-classical Old/New quality.

All concerned seem to be having a good time, even when confused, and the fun is contagious.

MAYBE NOT TO Cleveland Amory, but to your CoF reviewer at least. And, these days, who else can you trust?

— Joe Dante —